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THE *TITUS ANDRONICUS* PROBLEM

BY HENRY DAVID GRAY

Mr. T. M. Parrott has come forward¹ to uphold the traditional view that *Titus Andronicus* is a pre-Shakespearean tragedy-of-blood hastily and superficially revised by Shakespeare. His essay marks a distinct step forward in the discussion of this problem; it should be impossible hereafter to hold either of the two extreme views: that Shakespeare had no hand whatever in the *Titus*, or that he wrote the whole of it. Considering the external evidence, the testimony of many poets and scholars who find evidences of Shakespeare's style in certain passages, and the application of scientific tests by which, for example, we find in some of the scenes a percentage of double endings habitual with Shakespeare and never approached by any of his early contemporaries, there is no possible escape from the conclusion that Shakespeare made some contribution to the *Titus*. On the other hand, the instinctive rejection of the play by many admirable scholars, the strong evidence of the hand of Peele as shown by Mr. John M. Robertson² and of Greene as pointed out by Dr. Grosart,³ together with the repulsive nature of many of the episodes, leave us little room and less desire to believe that the play is wholly his. The only problems now remaining are: (1) to determine with more exactitude which portions of the play are Shakespeare's work, and (2) to inquire whether these portions constitute a revision of the play or an original draft which has suffered revision by others. A third possibility, of collaboration, remains for final consideration.

I have already twice stated my conviction⁴ that the natural presupposition in regard to the play should be rather that Shakespeare's first work was revised by other men than that he was in this instance the reviser. This belief I based primarily upon a

¹ *Modern Language Review*, January, 1919.

² *Did Shakespeare Write Titus Andronicus?* London, 1905.

³ *Englische Studien*, XXII, 417 f.

⁴ Flügel Memorial Volume, 1916, and *Modern Language Notes*, April, 1919.

structural study of the drama, finding that the scenes which showed the clearest and fullest evidences of Shakespeare's work belonged to the fundamental plan of the play, while the portions which were wholly un-Shakespearean seemed, structurally, to be due to revision. This "curious theory," as Mr. Parrott calls it, did not involve me in a reconsideration of the external evidence except to note that "a play which Shakespeare revised would presumably be acted by the company with which he was associated; whereas a play which he had originally written, if taken over by another company, would naturally be revised by the authors who worked for that company."⁵ But now Mr. Parrott has restated the facts as we find them in Henslowe's Diary, the *Stationers' Register*, and the old copies, and drawn from them a conclusion exactly the opposite of that to which these undisputed facts seem to me to point. His deductions, also, regarding the double ending test are open to some dispute; and as he turns these also against me in regard to the *Titus*, I may be pardoned for endeavoring to show (1) that the external evidence is wholly in favor of my position, and (2) that Mr. Parrott's statistics do not lead to the conclusions he draws from them.

The evidence we have to go on, then, is as follows:⁶ Henslowe records "titus & ondronicus" as "ne" on January 23, 1593/4, when it was acted by "the earle of susex his men," and he enters it as repeated on January 28 and February 6. On this very day, February 6, 1593/4, it was entered on the *Stationers' Register*; but the First Quarto, which was published shortly after, states that the play had been acted by the companies of Derby and Pembroke, as well as by that of Sussex. It is therefore obvious that Henslowe's "ne" means not *new* but newly revised, as it seems to frequently, since the Sussex production for which it was done was the last before the play was published. This is borne out by Johnson's

⁵ *Mod. Lang. Notes*, xxxiv, 247.

⁶ I agree fully with Mr. Parrott that we are warranted in drawing any conclusions regarding the *Titus and Vespacia* which was also, by Henslowe's showing, an unusually successful piece. The substitution of the name Vespacian for Lucius in the German adaptation gives no real warrant for supposing that *Titus Andronicus* was a revision of this play. Henslowe records a performance of "titus," apparently this same drama, two days after *Titus Andronicus* was produced as a "new" play. My conclusions are not inadjustable, however, to this theory.

coupling of *Titus Andronicus* with Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* as a similar play of the same period, in the familiar reference in *Bartholomew Fair*. That Q₁ was published before June 5, 1594, is indicated by Henslowe's mention of a performance on that date (with another on June 12) by the Lord Admiral's and Lord Chamberlain's men,—a production which only the later quartos register. Meres mentions *Titus Andronicus* as Shakespeare's in 1598, and Heminge and Condell included it in the First Folio. The play as published in the Folio contains one scene (III, ii) not previously printed, but gives no other changes of consequence. This exhausts our store of facts.

Mr. Parrott's conjecture, in which he follows Dr. Greg,⁷ that *Titus Andronicus* was surrendered by the Pembroke company in the autumn of 1593, when that company was in financial straits, seems to me wholly plausible. But when did the Earl of Derby's men possess the play? Mr. Parrott notes (as we all have) that Lord Strange became Earl of Derby September 25, 1593, and died in April, 1594; but it does not at all follow, as he supposes, that these dates mark any production of *Titus Andronicus* by the Earl of Derby's men. No printer would refer to the Earl of Derby as Lord Strange after he had received his final title, nor make with modern exactitude the discrimination that he was Lord Strange and not yet Earl of Derby at the time when his company produced the play. The normal conclusion is that the sequence of names on the quarto title page conforms with the facts: that *Titus Andronicus* was first in possession of Lord Strange's men, that is, the company with which Shakespeare was always associated both as dramatist and actor; that it was disposed of to the Pembroke people; that it was revised and produced at the Rose by the Sussex company in 1594; that it came again into Shakespeare's hands when the Chamberlain's men produced it; and that then Shakespeare added, or more probably restored, the scene which appears in the Folio and not in the Quartos. This reading of the facts has always seemed to me the only normal one,—the only one in which no strain is put upon any date or event.⁸

⁷ Henslowe's Diary, Part II, p. 161. London, 1908.

⁸ To insist upon keeping the Derby production between September 25, 1593, and April 16, 1594, is to leave us scant time indeed. The play was revised, rehearsed, and produced by the Sussex people four months after Lord Strange became Earl of Derby; and if Henslowe's "ne" means a

Now if Shakespeare had a hand in *Titus Andronicus*, it would naturally have been in this earliest stage of its history, before it became the property of the Pembroke and Sussex companies, and hence before Henslowe's recording of it as newly revised. How complete a revision Henslowe's "ne" entailed we cannot say; but there is every reason for supposing that it meant a thorough-going one, structural rather than verbal. Such fragmentary bits as Ravenscroft claimed a century later to have heard tell of,—that he added only "some master-touches to one or two of the principal parts of characters," which many critics have assumed constituted Shakespeare's revision,—could never have led Henslowe to regard the play as "new." Moreover, those portions of the play which Mr. Parrott assigns to Shakespeare are not in his 1594 manner but may with a clear conscience be attributed to him if he had written the original version of the drama by or before 1589, when, according to Jonson, the play was actually written and when the vogue of the *Spanish Tragedy* suggested to the young prince of imitators and borrowers his model.

Mr. Parrott's conclusion that the revision of 1594 was Shakespeare's work and that it was a hasty and superficial one involves, then, the following difficulties: (1) the revision could not be superficial, both because Henslowe records the play as "ne" and because the percentage of double endings in many of the scenes involves practically the entire composition of those scenes; (2) the style of these extended passages is Shakespeare's earliest and is not characteristic of the period of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; (3) the revision was acted by a company for which Shakespeare never wrote. We know, then, that the play *was* revised in 1594, and we have every reason for supposing that Shakespeare did *not* make the revision.

And if Shakespeare did not make the revision, the conclusion is almost unescapable that Peele was responsible for it. The many evidences of his work, which Mr. Robertson laboriously tabulates, are to be accounted for by the thoroughness with which he performed his task. Greene was dead, and Marlowe also; though of

thorough-going revision at least this amount of time would be required for it. To adjust a preconceived theory to such facts as these, one is forced to fall back on such wholly unsupported conjectures as that of Greg: "We must, therefore, suppose two copies." (Henslowe's Diary, Part II, p. 161.) Let us not "suppose" more than we have to.

the latter I shall not take account, for in spite of Fleay's conjecture I can find in this play no more than that overshadowing influence which is to be seen in so many of the early Elizabethan dramas. Kyd, too, appears rather as an inspirer than as a possible contributor to the *Titus*. But what shall we say of the evidences of Greene's work, which Grosart found so abundant and which Robertson also noted as conspicuous? The play as a whole does not seem to me at all like the work of Greene; but that there are indications that he had some part in it I am more than ready to admit. This contribution may well have come when the play passed from Strange's men to Pembroke's; but is there any reason for supposing that Greene was not the original author, or a collaborator with Shakespeare in the original draft of the piece? This suggestion brings me back to my first handling of this problem, and I need not now repeat what I have already written and what I still believe to be true. I have contended that the evidence is for Greene's revision of Shakespeare, rather than the reverse, and I have not been answered. That the play was in the first instance a collaboration seems to me unlikely for the same reasons which render Shakespeare's revision of Greene unlikely. Outside of Act IV, scene 1, which might well be his, and occasional passages like III, II, 254-288,⁹ the evidences of Greene's work are slight and fragmentary, and consist mostly in the presence of certain words which are characteristic of him and are not used elsewhere by Shakespeare. The tests of the once used word and the reminiscent phrase are among the most hazardous to employ in judging a work of disputed authorship.

Upon Mr. Parrott's discussion of the double endings in *Titus*, admirable as it is in many ways, I have one important stricture to make. It appears to me, as it does to him, that a high percentage of double endings in a scene is a strong indication of Shakespearean authorship; but it does not follow that a relatively low percentage precludes his authorship. The first act of *King John* contains a high percentage, but the remaining acts drop far beneath it. The opening scene of Act III, for example, containing 346 lines, has by my count 2.9 per cent. of double endings;¹⁰

⁹ For my reasons for insisting that both of these are the work of a reviewer, see *Flügel Memorial Volume*, p. 124.

¹⁰ I exclude the word heaven. See Flügel, *Memorial Volume*, p. 118, n.

Act V, scene II, of 61 lines, has only a single instance, or about 1.6 per cent. The first act of *Titus Andronicus*, therefore, with its 3.6 + per cent., cannot on this account be set aside as not the work of Shakespeare; indeed, this scene, though one of those where the percentage is lowest, is itself proportionally as high for Greene or Peele as it is low for Shakespeare. Mr. Parrott regards with suspicion even a showing of 6 per cent. because it is low for Shakespeare, without remembering how extremely high it is for any of his early contemporaries. Mr. Parrott "cannot find a single trace of Shakespeare's hand in the whole [first] act," though he cites three parallels; he quotes a passage from the central portion of the act, which I had definitely rejected, as showing the un-Shakespearean quality of the verse; and with that he dismisses the act and me together. If one feels strongly that the verse at the close of this act is so far inferior to Shakespeare's in his later histories and tragedies, let him compare some of the doggerel or the entire Muscovite episode in the fifth act of *Love's Labour's Lost* with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Merchant of Venice*.

Leland Stanford Junior University.
